

The Sustainability Strategy of the University of Münster

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A Sustainability at the University of Münster

Sustainable development is one of the central challenges of our time and requires societal transformation. Universities can make a substantial contribution to sustainable development by producing innovations and functioning as real-world interfaces for sustainable action and experience. Disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research approaches play a key role in addressing global challenges, such as climate change, mobility and clean energy transition, as well as matters related to peace and democracy. As institutions of higher education, universities are central to promoting sustainability skills in the decision-makers of tomorrow. Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that universities themselves are also part of the problem, as they consume considerable resources.

In its role as a research and educational institution, as well as an integral component of social life, the University of Münster assumes responsibility for the environmental, social and economic dimensions of its actions and the implications these have on generational fairness. With regard to research, teaching, transfer and operations, the University strives to take actions according to the principles of environmental and social sustainability. It sees itself obliged to contribute and develop potential solutions and recognises its status as a role model for promoting sustainable development within its scope of responsibility. The University of Münster also helps its employees and students to broaden their sustainability skills and activities.

As an internationally oriented place of research, academia and employment, the University of Münster regards sustainable action as an expression of its global responsibility to promote a viable future for society and to preserve a natural basis of existence for all. To this end, the University of Münster embraces a comprehensive understanding of sustainability as defined by the United Nations' *Sustainable Development Goals* and the objectives put forth in *the Paris Agreement*.

Research

Thanks to its extensive range of humanities, social science, natural science and life science subjects and the scientific diversity these provide, the University of Münster offers optimal conditions for pursuing inter- and transdisciplinary sustainability research as a cross-sectional task. Addressing the challenges of sustainability is relevant to all disciplines and such efforts should be supported across the board. At the same time, it is important to create an institutional framework that allows the University to review established academic structures, processes and practices with respect to their implications for environmental and social sustainability. In this regard, the University of Münster aims to live up to its responsibility for promoting sustainable development.

Teaching

Sustainability is a focus of orientation in teaching and represents a cross-sectional topic for all subjects and disciplines. Consequently, education for sustainable development (ESD) provides a guiding concept that emphasises the importance of competence-oriented teaching and

learning, as well as the development of inter- and transdisciplinary relationships. In the sense of research-oriented learning, the University of Münster aims to continually develop sustainability as a visible and inherent aspect of teaching and thus promote the skills necessary for developing problem-solving strategies.

Transfer

The University of Münster considers transfer – after research and teaching – as the third fundamental performance dimension of science and its achievement as one of its central responsibilities. Be it a component of participative projects, a relevant aspect of responsible start-up activities or a key dimension of knowledge transfer, sustainability plays a central role in all activities of the third performance dimension at the University of Münster. The University assumes a comprehensive view of transfer that emphasises cooperation and communication between the research sector and society, extending beyond the economic exploitation of knowledge or technology, and thus represents a sustainable resource for a democratic society.

Organisation, finances and operations

The University of Münster considers sustainability as an integral part of its everyday operations and financially consequential decisions. In an environmental respect, the University is committed to achieving climate neutrality, a regular review of its resource consumption with the goal of further reduction, and the sustainable use of recyclable materials. In a social respect, the University of Münster is an outspoken advocate for equal opportunity, diversity and inclusion as norms for equitable working conditions, fair teaching-learning processes and employee relations.

Governance

The University of Münster regards sustainability as a **binding and guiding principle** which all members of the University are to observe and respect. As a research-oriented institution of higher education, the University of Münster considers factors of environmental, social and economic sustainability and orientates its actions with respect to all three dimensions. Aware of the conflicting goals between its various target dimensions, the University of Münster sees **dialogue and participation** as essential maxims of governance for a sustainable university.

Sustainability is anchored within the structures of the University of Münster, making it an essential component of university culture as well as a relevant aspect of its activities. The “Sustainability Strategy” provides a framework of joint and overarching goals for the entire University. Sustainability activities take place at all central and faculty-based levels of operation.

The **University management** has allocated resources to implement central measures designed to promote sustainability. The Vice-Rectorate for Internationalization, Knowledge Transfer and Sustainability serves to structurally anchor and assume responsibility at the management level. This office ensures that sustainability is regularly considered as a strategically important cross-sectional issue, as well as advances processes and conceptual developments which broadly impact the University of Münster on the whole (e.g. University Development Plan (HEP), the Excellence Strategy etc.). The **Coordination Office for Sustainability Management** supports this holistic perspective, functions as the central liaison for the Rectorate, and is a contact point

for external parties and internal members of the University in all status groups. In addition to further developing the “Sustainability Strategy”, the coordination office is also responsible for **reporting** on all matters related to sustainability and initiating decision-making processes and projects in the spirit of integrated management. In coordination with central and faculty-level administrators, targeted **communication and public relations** measures are to be implemented to ensure that the University’s sustainability activities are visible to the public.

The **Center of Interdisciplinary Sustainability Research (ZIN)** is a central scientific facility of the University of Münster which is responsible for coordinating and supporting cross-faculty sustainability research, teaching and transfer activities. It especially serves to strengthen inter- and transdisciplinary discussion on the environmental and social/societal challenges of sustainability, as well as to jointly seek potential solutions.

The University of Münster is currently building a hub devoted to sustainability-related issues where central and faculty-level administrators can collaborate and where the performance dimensions of research, teaching and transfer are intertwined. The Coordination Office for Sustainability Management and ZIN are engaged in close, regular exchange and are working to get students involved at the institutional level. To this end, these facilities provide central and faculty-level units with support in achieving their sustainability objectives. These efforts have an impact on two levels: supporting and promoting faculty-based measures and strategies on the one hand, and conducting cross-faculty, university-wide sustainability activities on the other.

The University of Münster has established an **advisory board** to accompany and strategically orientate the sustainability activities for all status groups, and to advise the participants who are actively involved, especially those in the executive committees of the University of Münster. The advisory board will be comprised of members of the University of Münster and external experts from the field.

With the development and continual improvement of the Sustainability Strategy, the University of Münster aims to achieve the following goals:

- Goal 1 The University of Münster will anchor the responsibilities and processes of sustainability promotion into its organisational structure in the long term.
- Goal 2 The University of Münster will develop reporting formats for sustainability and use these to regularly review the goals and measures.
- Goal 3 The University of Münster will actively communicate the Sustainability Strategy within and outside the University, encourage dialogue and participation at all levels, and thereby enable University members to act accordingly through qualification and awareness-building measures.

B Fields of action

Field of Action 1: Research

The University of Münster strives to align the requirements of excellent research with the demands of sustainability. Research at the University of Münster generates both content-based and procedural contributions for a sound, participative, viable coexistence. It serves to analyse, reflect on, shape and support conditions which facilitate social action. Consequently, sustainability is established and promoted as a **research subject and guiding principle** across all disciplines and academic fields, all the while safeguarding the freedom of research.

This orientation on research with respect to sustainability influences the research focuses of individual researchers and comprises a subject of investigation within their respective research groups. In order to study and conduct in-depth examination of the complex challenges of sustainable development, collaborative partnerships between different academic and scientific cultures (natural and life sciences, social sciences, humanities and cultural studies) are just as important as networking between empirical and application-oriented research groups. Sustainability research is characterised by multi-perspectivity, inter- and transdisciplinary research constellations, and the development of recommended courses of action. The University of Münster is drafting **framework conditions** which effectively meet these demands. The Centre of Interdisciplinary Sustainability Research is a central academic facility of the University of Münster responsible for providing researchers with support, continuing education and networking opportunities in the area of sustainability research. In close cooperation with the Coordination Office for Sustainability Management and the central facilities of the University of Münster, efforts are underway to create a suitable institutional infrastructure and support services. These include thematically relevant **advisory services** for research projects, regular **dialogue- and network-based events** and **support services for early-career researchers**.

Social and environmental sustainability are not only a focus of research, but a criterion for developing **research processes**. This includes the responsible use of natural resources. The processes associated with research (e.g. mobility, energy consumption, waste disposal, procurement) require continual reflection on and increasing awareness of sustainability. To establish a sustainable research environment, not only must we consider the researchers' **working conditions**, but also communication and the modes of cooperation within research projects, processes and facilities. The University of Münster will be engaging in dialogue with its researchers and relevant external experts on sustainability to critically examine the contradictory developments with respect to financing, conducting and utilising research. Wherever possible and reasonable, measures, processes and guidelines will be adjusted in cooperation with the responsible **administrative departments** to facilitate and promote sustainable operations in the University's central and faculty-based units.

Goals

- Goal 1 The University of Münster will promote inter- and transdisciplinary research on the challenges of environmental, social and economic sustainability.

- Goal 2 The University of Münster will work to orientate research processes and facilities to the criteria of environmental and social sustainability.

Field of Action 2: Teaching

The University of Münster regards sustainability as an essential element of teaching and a central dimension of research-oriented learning. **Education for sustainable development (ESD)** is a guiding concept for future action in this respect. It makes sustainability an explicit subject of teaching and encourages students to assume social responsibility with regard to sustainability. The aim is to highlight the relevance of sustainability at the beginning of one's degree programme, as well as the responsibility that all academic disciplines bear for society. The inter- and transdisciplinary aspects of sustainability that exceed the scope of one's subject and degree programme should also be a focus of instruction. Anchoring sustainability as an independent area of competence in **General Studies** is the first step in this process.

To establish sustainability as a cross-sectional topic in the disciplines, we must anchor sustainability-relevant skills, themes and content into the curricula of our degree programmes. The examination of and familiarisation with best-practice approaches by the faculties can serve as an instrument to this end. The University will also work to publicise the topic further through **continuing education measures offered by the Centre for Teaching in Higher Education (ZHL)**, which help instructors integrate ESD into their courses. Parallel to these measures, theme-based events, communication channels and sustainability-related course formats will be developed (e.g. Day of Teaching, lecture series).

The **committees** of the University of Münster responsible for teaching and studies (Study Advisory Councils, Committee for Teaching and Studies) will serve as advisory instruments to amplify the overall effectiveness of the ESD-related measures. This will make the topic a standardised component of teaching at the University of Münster. Moreover, efforts will be undertaken to make better use of the existing and developing **network structures** within and outside the University of Münster.

Goals

- Goal 1 The University of Münster will recognise education for sustainable development (ESD) as an underlying principle of orientation and explicit subject of teaching and will develop ESD as a study profile.
- Goal 2 The University of Münster will offer instructors and multipliers continuing education measures, space for sustainability-related courses and course formats, and offer students opportunities to gain qualification in the field of sustainability.
- Goal 3 The University of Münster will consider sustainability in degree programme development processes, as well as teaching and study quality assurance, and will integrate sustainability-relevant courses into various degree programmes.

Field of Action 3: Transfer

The University of Münster regards transfer activities as a vehicle for assuming **civic responsibility** in all areas of society. To adequately meet this responsibility, the University of Münster seeks intensive exchange with various stakeholders in society to promote sustainability in the spirit of the *Sustainable Development Goals* and the *Paris Agreement*. The demands of sustainability transfer require the joint effort of all University members in all status groups and cooperation with a broad range of social, political and economic partners who are active from the municipal to the global level. Sustainability is thus an explicit part of the University's "**Transfer Strategy**" in the concrete fields of action *science communication, lifelong learning, citizen science, entrepreneurship, technology transfer and culture*.

Sustainability-oriented transfer activities serve the common good and help promote the (further) participative development of society toward a more socially and environmentally sustainable lifestyle. Through transfer activities, the University of Münster helps promote education for sustainable development (ESD) outside the university community. To enable certain target groups in society to gain the necessary competence to shape the future, we must communicate scientific findings on sustainability issues in a generally understandable and accessible way through various forms and channels of communication. Aside from presenting research content, **scientific communication** (which includes relevant art and cultural projects) performs a valuable service by sensitising the public to existing challenges and potential strategies of sustainability.

To anchor sustainability in all areas of society and interlink theory with practical considerations, we must intensify the dialogue with society. The central pillars in this regard consist of **citizen science, stakeholder dialogue and regional partnerships**. Citizen science projects offer citizens the opportunity to discuss the challenges of sustainability and develop strategies to address them in a co-creative process. The resulting findings and activities serve as the basis for further research and practical application. Through regular exchange and networking with policymakers, businesses and civil partners at the local, regional, national and international level, the projects address stakeholders' needs, adopt new impulses and introduce real-world problems in research and teaching (e.g. in the form of field labs). Intensifying cooperation between regional partners, academic institutions and non-university research organisations helps create synergies which promote sustainable development.

The University of Münster strives to increase sustainability-oriented **start-up ventures and technology transfer** in order to address current and future challenges related to sustainability and to transfer suitable solutions to the market. Thanks to its expertise in the areas of health (SDG 2 and 3), biodiversity and energy (SDG 7, 11, 12, 13) and education (SDG 4), the University of Münster can contribute effective solutions in this regard. It is also developing and strengthening advisory services, impulses and collaboration with networking partners (e.g. AFO, REACH). Moreover, it views an environmentally and socially sensitive patent strategy as necessary for promoting the dissemination of sustainable technologies.

To promote the integration and participation of all members of the University in matters of sustainability transfer, the University of Münster is developing a concept to improve communication across all status groups. At the same time, it is evaluating the dynamics and quality of sustainability transfer by **documenting transfer activities in a continuous and differentiated manner**. On this basis, it can identify impulses for adjusting its activities as necessary.

Goals

- Goal 1 The University of Münster will put in place and expand a target-group-compatible and accessible science communication on sustainability.
- Goal 2 The University of Münster will intensify its collaboration and dialogue with non-university partners in matters of sustainability, especially in the region, and will promote sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship and technology transfer.
- Goal 3 The University of Münster will develop and evaluate its transfer activities in view of their implications for sustainability.

Field of Action 4: Infrastructure, organisation, finances and operational management

The University of Münster is creating long-term framework conditions for sustainability in research, teaching and transfer. It regards sustainability as a guiding principle in the operational **processes and decisions within the University's scope of influence** and coexistence within the university community. These include environmental and social criteria which, among other areas, include energy supply, building and property management, procurement, mobility, waste disposal and the organisation of conferences and other events. The University of Münster orientates itself accordingly to the principles of **sufficiency, efficiency, and consistency**.

The University of Münster is committed to ensuring **environmentally friendly infrastructural operation**. To this end, it has focused on **climate neutrality** as a means of making an institutional contribution to social transformation. In cooperation with all the administrative departments, the Coordination Office for Sustainability Management is developing a strategy to promote active climate protection and calculate a CO₂ footprint. This footprint will serve as part of a system of indicators to improve and continually monitor the University's operations with respect to environmental and climate protection.

Fostering sustainability within the university community also requires personnel development measures which are equitable, career- and life-phase-oriented. The University of Münster facilitates academic and career opportunities for students and employees irrespective of their gender, age, background, health, sexual orientation or other personal traits. In the sense of social sustainability, we actively support diversity, inclusion and gender equality at all levels and in all areas of the University of Münster.

The University of Münster is working to ensure that its sustainability goals and measures are implemented on all levels and in all structures by the employees themselves. In light of the subsidiary organisational structure of the University of Münster, **communication** and **participation** are key building blocks for an integrated sustainability management. Each and every one of us is personally responsible for reviewing the operational processes with respect to sustainability and taking it into account when making departmental or cross-faculty-level decisions. Supervisory staff act as the drivers, role models and multipliers in promoting sustainability in their respective areas. The University of Münster is developing corresponding measures to raise awareness and provide training to employees by means of **personnel development measures**.

In the area of operational management, **regional cooperation** (e.g. with the city of Münster, the Münster University of Applied Sciences, Student Support Services and the Münster University Hospital (UKM)) is being intensified in order to increase and further develop the potentials of sustainability. In addition to infrastructural development and enhancement, **digitalisation** offers opportunities to increase sustainability in teaching, research and working processes.

Goals

Goal 1 The University of Münster will gradually integrate sustainability as a criterion in all relevant processes of operational management (procurement, construction, mobility, waste disposal, personnel management etc.).

Sustainability Strategy

- Goal 2 The University of Münster will strive to reduce its resource consumption with the aim of achieving climate neutrality. To this end, it will produce a sustainability report and review the achievement of its objectives.
- Goal 3 The University of Münster will promote social sustainability by strengthening gender equality, diversity and inclusion with the aim of creating more equitable working conditions, fairer teaching-learning processes and a friendlier working environment.

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